DOCTOR HANDLER SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

(Recorded interview, transcription, and newsletter design by KJF Interns Jurnee and Robert)

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What type of doctor are you at CHOP? 
Tell us about your practice and career.

I'm a pediatric ENT (ears nose and throat) doctor. I've been at CHOP for 41 years, this has been my only job and my only career that's why I've been here the whole time.

What was your experience at medical school and how long did it take?

My medical school lasted four years and it was quite difficult. I was together with many people I always thought were much smarter, knowledgeable and much more experienced than me. I always felt like I'm not going to get up and finish as much as some of these other people because they were very smart. I liked it because it was closer to what I knew I wanted to do. You know when you're in college you're getting experience and trying to find out certain things. But when I decided to go to medical school I was closer to my goal of what I was going to be doing.

Was the medical school you went to always your dream school and if so why?

I didn't really have a dream school. I grew up in Los Angeles, went to high school in Los Angeles. I was lucky enough to go to Yale as an undergraduate, so I came East and my possibility was to go to Yale medical school or go back to UCLA Medical School and be closer to home. I think UCLA Medical School was my parents dream--that I come back to Los Angeles. But I would have been happy with either place.
Growing up as a child did you know you would like to work in the medical field or did you have another dream?

So, I always liked to do things with my hands. I thought of some sort of engineering or task-oriented process and I don’t know how it happened but one day I was looking at my aunt’s medical books from nursing school and I was looking at these pictures. I said, "Oh my goodness this is amazing!" It was my experience with her that convinced me to go to school. My father was a hairdresser and also was a prisoner of war, World War II. My mother's family was in a concentration camp. I was the first one to go to college in our family.

Does your job interfere with your regular life?

It does take a lot of time. There is no question about it. But I am so wrapped up in my job and I love my job so much and that it is OK. I still have time for my family, and I have time for other things. Believe me, I live in the hospital, but it allows me to do a lot of things. And my time spent in the hospital is so rewarding to me that it spills over, so I look forward to going to work. I don't look forward to getting up at 5:00 in the morning but I look forward to going to work and seeing patients and taking care of patients. I do a lot of teaching: I teach medical students, I teach residents and fellows who are trainees in medicine. One of the benefits I have here is that I'm able to help people along in their careers because someone helped me, and I think it's very important we stand on the shoulders of the people that came before us and were able to help and we offer things to other people. And you're going to do a better job than your parents did or than your grandparents did, because you have that experience and that knowledge and that motivation. So, to me that's a really cool thing, taking care of patients and teaching some of the things that I really love doing!
Have you ever wanted to come to the College and teach a class of young students?

I would be happy to do that. We have a *take your child to work day* here. So often I'm asked to come talk to some of the family children or members of the hospital staff and I teach them. I show them what my tools look like. I show them what the hospital gown and mask look like. Also, I talk to them about some surgical instruments and stuff like that.

**Was there ever a time you wanted to throw the towel in and if so how did you overcome it?**

You know I never got to that point. I never got the point to say I'm quitting. I enjoy it too much. I also enjoy the challenge, so if there's a problem there I want to take care of it. I work a lot in informatics. I help the hospital with the computer system—the hospital medical records are electronic now. It didn’t used to be, when I was growing up, and up until 20 years ago everything was written down on paper. Now it’s all in the computer and we can find it on the smartphone or tablet. I'm involved in working with that. I just came from a meeting with a couple of colleagues about that recently because we're trying to make it more efficient for us to document what surgeries we do and how we bill it properly to the insurance company to get reimbursed and compensated properly. I like those challenges. I also work in the ethics department here at the hospital. I work with teaching bioethics and I work with residents and students on ethics and professionalism and behavior--things that aren't necessarily taught in a textbook of medicine but are part of how you behave as a doctor or a respiratory therapist or a physical therapist. You know those kinds of things, so I enjoy doing those things. So that's my very long-winded way of saying no, I've never thought about quitting. You know there are some hard days and some days I go home and say it wasn't much fun, but I look for the next day.
Where did you get the tie from?

My ties are given to me for the most part. I started wearing character and unusual ties when I came here in 1977 a long time ago. People started noticing I was wearing these things and now I have not bought a tie for decades. So, I have about 122-character ties. I retired some. My wife jokes that we should give them to the Smithsonian but that's not going to happen. But, I have fun ones and now my newest thing is socks that don’t match. I decided there's no reason to have a match because when one started ripping I'd have to get rid of a whole pair. The kids love it, and then I tell them I have another pair just like this at home.

Is your job always so serious or are there times where you guys have fun?

Well there are times where it's very serious. No question. Sometimes we deal with some very serious diagnoses and some very sick children. So, we have to be aware how the family feels about that. On the other hand, the family members enjoy lightness and happiness and participating in activities that are fun. We're not like walking around somber you know with somebody who's sick. But we have to appropriately know how sick they are and what they can do and that we also want to cheer them up. There are some serious times. But the majority I think are a lot of fun and I love to joke with the families. I love to joke with the children. I give all the kids stickers when they leave and often if I haven't done so quickly enough and they're ready they say they “sticker.” They want to make sure they remind me so that I won't forget. One of the things that I do that I have a lot of fun with is I take out foreign bodies--things that kids put in their ears, nose and throat. I think when you work with children and people who are learning, I think it is really rewarding.
Can you tell us one piece of advice you would give to a group of young teens?

One piece of advice I think keep your options open. I think ask questions don't be embarrassed to ask questions. Some people feel that what they ask is silly or not important, but it is important to you. So, when I have students with me like medical students, the ones who are sitting in the corner or like sometimes where we've had people around the table and someone is in the second row I say, "bring yourself to the table. Be part of the conversation. Be part of the action." And so, my advice would be, be open be curious ask questions you know politely ask questions. So those kinds of things I think are important to engage because there is nothing more flattering to me than interested students who has good questions.